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PM FOR CHRISTOPHER PETRONE AND HYUN KIM

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SUBJECT: U.S.-Vietnam Defense Dialogues

REF: A) 09 STATE 112900; B) 09 HANOI 825

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. The U.S. and Vietnam currently conduct two annual defense-related dialogues with Vietnam: the U.S.-Vietnam Political, Security, and Defense Dialogue (State-led), and the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Defense Dialogue (U.S. Pacific Command-led). Both are relatively new, starting in 2008 and 2005 respectively, and are evolving into constructive forums producing solid results. Post strongly supports both dialogues and sees great value in continuing both discussions. End summary.

U.S.-Vietnam Political, Security, and Defense Dialogue

¶2. (SBU) The annual U.S.-Vietnam Political, Security, and Defense Dialogue was established in October 2008 through discussions with the Government of Vietnam. The most recent meeting occurred on June 8, 2009. The initial talks were first proposed by the U.S. in various meetings with Vietnamese officials through the provision of a non-paper explaining what such discussions would entail. The GVN formally accepted to the first session via a dipnote inviting the U.S. side to Hanoi. The continuing existence of the dialogue and its frequency were agreed upon with the GVN at the first round and are not controlled through a binding agreement. There is no set schedule; however, both sides expect to continue to meet annually. The next meeting date has not been set.

¶3. (SBU) The U.S. side is led by the Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, with participation from relevant offices at State, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for Policy, the Joint Staff, and U.S. Pacific Command. The GVN delegation to the October 2008 and the June 2009 meeting was led by the Deputy Foreign Minister and included participants from the Ministries of Defense and Public Security. The GVN has expressed appreciation for the senior level at which the talks are held.

¶4. (SBU) While the dialogue is relatively new, it has had an important and positive influence on our bilateral defense relationship by establishing a senior level venue to exchange ideas, learn each other's perspectives, and make forward progress on specific areas of cooperation. While the dialogues were somewhat stilted at first, we expect future rounds to follow the example of the Bilateral Defense Dialogue (discussed below) and evolve into more substantive, open exchanges. Further, the dialogue sends a clear signal to the GVN leadership about the importance of the defense and security relationship to the United States - a key factor in making tangible progress with Vietnam.

Bilateral Defense Dialogue

15. (SBU) The annual U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Defense Dialogue (BDD) was established four years ago through discussions between the Ministry of Defense and U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), and is a military-to-military dialogue. The most recent meeting occurred on September 9-10, 2009. The existence of the dialogue and its frequency were agreed upon through discussions with the GVN and are not controlled through a binding agreement. There is no set schedule; however, both sides expect to meet annually. The next meeting date has not been set.

16. (SBU) At September's BDD, the U.S. side was led by a flag officer from USPACOM, with participation from the component commands, OSD, the Joint Staff, and a U.S. Mission Vietnam representative. The GVN side was also led by a flag officer, the Director of MOD's External Relations Department, with participation from various military commands. This was the first BDD led at the flag officer level; past meetings were led at the colonel level. Given the ability of the MOD flag officer to make decisions during the dialogue and the meeting's positive outcomes, we understand that USPACOM intends to advocate for a flag officer on both sides to led future meetings. We endorse this approach and believe senior level leadership is required on both sides to engage in

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useful exchanges and achieve concrete results.

17. (SBU) The BDD has evolved over time into a productive meeting, as evidenced by the last iteration in September (ref B). In previous meetings, the U.S. side was frustrated by the MOD's tendency to read prepared remarks and take all U.S. statements down for further consideration. By contrast, at the most recent round of the BDD, flag officers participated, and the Vietnamese side demonstrated an increased degree of comfort and sophistication. As a result, the dialogue involved a much more of an open, productive exchange of ideas and provided a valuable forum to move issues forward.

Potential Strategic Defense Dialogue

18. (SBU) OSD has proposed a U.S.-Vietnam Strategic Defense Dialogue at the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense level to Vietnam and the MOD has responded positively to the idea. We understand OSD's intent is to complement the BDD and the Political, Security and Defense Dialogue, not replace them. To post's knowledge, no date or agenda have been set for this dialogue.
Palmer